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FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY ROGERS

FOLLOWING REPEAT BUENOS AIRES 0660 ACTION SECSTATE INFO
ASUNCION BRASILIA LA PAZ MONTEVIDEO SANTIAGO 30 JANUARY 76.

QUOTE

S E C R E T BUENOS AIRES 0660

USCINCSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, US, XM, AR

SUBJECT: ARGENTINE PERCEPTIONS OF THE US

REF: STATE 010605

FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY ROGERS FROM AMBASSADOR HILL

1. ARGENTINE PERCEPTIONS OF ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE US HAVE
CHANGED MARKEDLY OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS. DURING CAMPORA'S
BRIEF TURN IN THE PRESIDENCY, ARGENTINA SAW ITSELF AS THE RIVAL
OF THE US AND BRAZIL FOR HEMISPHERIC LEADERSHIP. IT WAS NOT SO
QUIXOTIC, EVEN THEN, AS TO BELIEVE THIS RIVALRY COULD BE ARTI-
CULATED IN MILITARY OR ECONOMIC TERMS; RATHER, IT WAS POSITED
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ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT OTHER SPANISH SPEAKING NATIONS OF THE
HEMISPHERE WOULD TURN NATURALLY TO A STRONG ARGENTINA AS THEIR
CHAMPION AGAINST THE US AND PORTUGUESE-SPEAKING BRAZIL--
ESPECIALLY IF ARGENTINE ADOPTED A POSTURE OF CONFRONTING THE TWO.

2. WITH CAMPORA'S OUSTER AND PERON'S ASSUMPTION OF THE PRESIDENCY, THIS CONFLICT MODEL GAVE WAY QUICKLY TO A POLICY OF CLOSE COOPERATION WITH THE US. PERON, AND EVEN MORE SO HIS FOREIGN MINISTER, VIGNES, BELIEVED THAT WHILE ARGENTINA SHOULD MAINTAIN AN INDEPENDENT POLICY LINE--INCLUDING MEMBERSHIP IN THE THIRD WORLD--SHE COULD GAIN FAR MORE FROM COOPERATION THAN FROM CONFRONTATION WITH THE US. IN TIME, ARGENTINA'S WHOLE APPROACH TO THE HEMISPHERIC EQUATION CAME TO BE BUILT AROUND THE CONVICTION THAT THERE SHOULD BE A WASHINGTON-BUENOS AIRES AXIS--AN AXIS WHICH WOULD DILUTE THE LINES BETWEEN WASHINGTON AND BRASILIA AND AT THE SAME TIME VALIDATE ARGENTINA'S OWN LEADERSHIP PRETENSIONS. THE KISSINGER-VIGNES RELATIONSHIP BECAME THE CORE FACTOR OF ARGENTINE FOREIGN POLICY, OUTLIVING PERON, WHO DIED IN JULY OF 1974. US-ARGENTINE RELATIONS DURING THIS TWO-YEAR PERIOD (MORE OR LESS FROM JULY OF 1973 UNTIL JULY OF 1975) WERE AS GOOD AS AND PROBABLY BETTER THAN THEY HAD BEEN FOR MANY YEARS.

3. ALMOST FROM THE DEATH OF PERON FORWARD, HOWEVER, ARGENTINE POLICY BEGAN TO BE TROUBLED BY INTERNAL CONTRADICTIONS. ITS SUCCESS DEPENDED UPON A SOLID DOMESTIC BASE--A RESURGENT ARGENTINE. WITH THAT BASE BECOMING, ON THE CONTRARY, EVER MORE INSECURE AND WITH MRS. PERON UNABLE TO OFFER LEADERSHIP EVEN TO HER OWN PARTY--LET ALONE TO THE COUNTRY OR THE REST OF THE HEMISPHERE--VIGNES'S FOREIGN POLICY WAS LEFT DANGLING IN AIR. WITH THE INTENSE POLITICAL TURMOIL THAT BEGAN IN JUNE OF 1975 AND VIGNES'S OUSTER TWO MONTHS LATER, IT COLLAPSED ALTOGETHER. ARGENTINA IS NOW TOO CAUGHT UP IN ITS INTERNAL STRIFE TO FORGE A STRONG, COHERENT FOREIGN POLICY (THOUGH QUIJANO WILL PROBABLY DO A MUCH BETTER JOB OF TRYING THAN HAVE HIS TWO IMMEDIATE PREDECESSORS). FEW ARGENTINES STILL HAVE ANY PRETENSIONS FOR LEADERSHIP IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE. AND, WHILE, ALL FOREIGN MINISTERS SINCE VIGNES HAVE CONTINUED TO SAY THAT GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE US ARE ONE OF THE CORNERSTONES OF THEIR POLICIES, THERE IS NO LONGER ANY FAR-REACHING GOAL OR GLOBAL VISION BEHIND IT. ON THE CONTRARY, ONE NOW HAS THE IMPRESSION THAT ARGENTINA IS SIMPLY LOOKING FOR A FRIEND WHO CAN THROW HER A ROPE. INCREAS-
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INGLY, THE "WHAT CAN WE DO TOGETHER IN THE HEMISPHERE" APPROACH OF VIGNES IS GIVING WAY TO ONE OF "YOU ARE OUR FIENDS; CAN YOU BAIL US OUT WHEN THE TIME COMES?" (THOUGH MOST ARGENTINES KNOW FULL WELL THAT NEITHER THE US NOR ANYONE ELSE CAN DO MUCH TO HELP THEM UNTIL THEY THEMSELVES COME UP WITH A STABLE GOVT).

4. INPLICIT IN THE ABOVE ANALYSIS IS THE CONCLUSION THAT IF THE US-ARGENTINE EQUATION HAS CHANGED, IT HAS DONE SO EITHER BECAUSE THE FACTORS ON THE ARGENTINE SIDE HAVE SHIFTED, OR BECAUSE ARGENTINA HAS ADJUSTED ITS PERCEPTION OF WHAT ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE US SHOULD BE. BASICALLY, CHANGES HAVE NOT COME ABOUT BECAUSE OF ANY ARGENTINE PERCEPTION OF CHANGING FACTORS ON THE US SIDE. SECRETARY KISSINGER'S FAILURE TO VISIT ARGENTINE AS PLANNED LAST SPRING HURT THEIR FEELINGS AND CAUSED THE ARGEN-

TINES TO WONDER ABOUT OUR SINCERITY, BUT IT DID NOT LEAD TO ANY BASIC POLICY CHANGES; RATHER, THE POLICY COLLAPSED SEVERAL MONTHS LATER BECAUSE OF DOMESTIC FACTORS HERE. INDEED, IN ARGENTINE CALCULATIONS, THE US HAS SO FAR REMAINED A RELATIVE CONSTANT. THEY DID NOT UNDERSTAND WATERGATE AND ARE PUZZLED BY OUR INABILITY TO ACT IN ANGOLA. THEY BELIEVE WE MAY HAVE BEEN RELATIVELY WEAKENED BY THE SERIES OF TRAUMAS THAT HAVE BESET US, BUT THE US IS STILL THE COLOSSUS OF THE NORTH, AND, TO THE EXTENT THAT IT IS STILL BASED ON ANY CLEAR RATIONALE, ARGENTINE POLICY, WHETHER FRIENDLY OR HOSTILE, MUST BE ADDRESSED PRIMARILY TO IT.

5. THIS IS NOT TO SAY, HOWEVER, THAT THERE ARE NOT NUANCES WITHIN THAT RELATIVE CONSTANT ARGENTINES HAVE WATCHED CLOSELY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE US--AND IN THE US WORLD POSITION. THEY HAVE OPINIONS ABOUT THOSE DEVELOPMENTS AND HOW THEY MAY RELATE TO LATIN AMERICA. IN TIME, THESE NEW PERCEPTIONS COULD HAVE REAL IMPACT ON ARGENTINA'S CONCEPTUAL CONSTRUCT OF ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH US. GIVEN BELOW ARE WHAT WE UNDERSTAND THOSE PERCEPTIONS TO BE. THESE ARE GEARED TO A THROUGH J OF PARA TWO OF REFTEL.

6. ARGENTINES GENERALLY SEE THE US AS WEAKENED BY THE SERIES OF DIFFICULTIES WE HAVE FACED DURING THE PAST FEW YEARS. THEY WERE GLAD TO SEE US GET OUT OF VIETNAM BUT STILL SAW IT AS A US DEFEAT. THEY DO NOT UNDERSTAND WHY CONGRESS IS REVEALING US INTELLIGENCE SECRETS AND THEY PERCEIVE THAT THIS WILL INHIBIT OUR INITIATIVES IN A NUMBER OF WAYS AND PERHAPS EMBARRASS OUR SECRET

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FRIENDS. ON WATERGATE, ARGENTINES ARE MORE AMBIGUOUS. MOST SEEM TO BELIEVE IT SHOWED AMERICAN INSTITUTIONS AND THE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM WERE STRONG, BUT AT THE COST OF LEAVING THE US POLITICAL SCENE IN CONSIDERABLE DISARRAY.

7. VIETNAM DID NOT CAUSE MOST ARGENTINES TO QUESTION OUR ABILITY TO LIVE UP TO INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS. MOST SEEMED TO FEEL WE HAD DONE ALL THAT WAS HUMANLY POSSIBLE IN AN IMPOSSIBLE SITUATION. THE THIEU GOVT WAS SEEN AS CORRUPT AND UNACCEPTABLE TO ITS PEOPLE. COMMITMENTS TO IT WERE NOT SEEN, THEREFORE, AS MEANING MUCH. ARGENTINES SAW THE COLLAPSE AS A DEFEAT FOR THE US BUT THEY WERE GLAD TO SEE US GET OUT SINCE THEY HOPED THAT WOULD ENABLE US TO GIVE MORE ATTENTION TO OTHER AREA

8. ARGENTINES GENERALLY DO NOT UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE ADMINISTRATION AND THE CONGRESS. MOST REMAIN CONVINCED THAT THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH CAN FOLLOW THROUGH IF IT REALLY WISHES TO. THE FEW SOPHISTICATED OBSERVERS (LARGELY NORTH AMERICAN EXPERTS IN THE FOREIGN MINISTRY, A FEW INTELLECTUALS AND NEWSPAPERMEN) WHO DO UNDERSTAND ARE WORRIED. THEY SEE WHAT HAPPENED TO THE TRADE BILL AND IN ANGOLA. IN THEIR MINDS, THEN, THE ADMINISTRATION'S ABILITY TO FOLLOW

THROUGH ON COMMITMENTS IS IN SOME DOUBT. EVEN THEY, HOWEVER, HAVE NOT YET DRAWN ANY DEFINITE CONCLUSIONS AND SOME FEEL THIS IS A PASSING PHENOMENON WHICH A NEW ADMINISTRATION WOULD BE ABLE TO SORT OUT QUICKLY. SHOULD ADMINISTRATION'S PROBLEMS WITH CONGRESS CONTINUE AND NEW MEASURES BE BLOCKED BECAUSE OF IT, ARGENTINES WOULD INDEED BEGIN TO WONDER SERIOUSLY ABOUT US DEPENDABILITY.

9. AS SUGGESTED ABOVE, MOST ARGENTINES DO NOT UNDERSTAND THE US POLITICAL PROCESS. IF THINGS GO WRONG, THEY USUALLY BLAME THE EXECUTIVE. BASICALLY, HOWEVER, IT DOES NOT MATTER MUCH TO MOST ARGENTINES WHICH BRANCH OF GOVT IS AT FAULT. IF COMMITMENTS ARE NOT KEPT, THE USG AS A WHOLE IS BLAMED.

10. THE TRADITIONAL VIEW PREVAILS, BUT IT MAY BE CHANGING. ARGENTINA'S WILLINGNESS TO COOPERATE WITH US AND ACCEPT OUR SECURITY GUARANTEES IS STILL HIGH, BUT IT IS FALLING AND, IF PRESENT TRENDS CONTINUE IN THE US, WILL FALL STILL FURTHER.
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11. THINKING ARGENTINES ARE CONCERNED BY THE IMPLICATIONS OF CUBAN INVOLVEMENT IN ANGOLA. MILITARY MEN ESPECIALLY DRAW FROM IT THE LESSON THAT ARGENTINA NEEDS A LARGER AND MORE MODERN ARMED FORCE TO COUNTER SUCH CUBAN CAPABILITIES. MILITARY MEN ARE ALSO BEGINNING TO WONDER IF WHAT IS HAPPENING IN ANGOLA MEANS THEY CANNOT COUNT ON THE US TO HELP THEM AGAINST SUCH A THREAT AND THEY POINT OUT ANGOLA IS NEARER ARGENTINA THAN THE US.

12. ARGENTINA WAVERS BETWEEN TWO POLES WITH RESPECT TO BILATERALISM VERSUS MULTILATERALISM. ON THE ONE HAND, IT HAS FREQUENTLY ALLUDED TO THE ADVANTAGES OF SPEAKING WITH ONE VOICE, AND IT IS A FULLY PARTICIPATING MEMBER OF THE OAS AND SELA. ON THE OTHER, IT HAS GENERALLY PREFERRED TO DEAL WITH THE US ON A BILATERAL BASIS. THIS MAY HAVE BEEN BECAUSE IT SAW ITSELF AS A KEY COUNTRY WITH DEFINITE INTERESTS OF ITS OWN TO ARTICULATE--INTERESTS WHICH IT DID NOT WISH TO SEE SUBMERGED IN SOME MULTILATERAL FORUM OR DEMARCHE. BUT AT THE SAME TIME THERE ARE A NUMBER OF LONG-RANGE INTERESTS WHICH IT BELIEVES MIGHT BEST BE ADVANCED THROUGH MULTILATERAL CHANNELS. ONE WONDERS IF ARGENTINA MAY NOT SHIFT INCREASINGLY TO THE MULTILATERAL CHANNEL AS ITS OWN POSITION WEAKENS AND IT FEELS ITS VOICE ALONE TO HAVE INSUFFICIENT IMPACT.

13. WE DO NOT BELIEVE ARGENTINA'S VOTING PATTERNS HAVE CHANGED APPRECIABLY OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS--CERTAINLY NOT SINCE 1973 WHEN SHE FIRST BECAME OFFICIALLY ASSOCIATED WITH THE THIRD WORLD. TO THE EXTENT THAT THEY HAVE CHANGED, THIS PROBABLY RESULTS FROM ARGENTINE PERCEPTIONS OF WHAT IS TO HER ADVANTAGE IN THE WORLD AT LARGE, NOT FROM A CHANGING PERCEPTION OF THE US.

14. EMBASSY HAS NO EVIDENCE THAT GOA TURNING AWAY FROM US AND

TO ANOTHER NATION FOR ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL SUPPORT. US CONTINUES TO BE A MAJOR TRADING PARTNER AND ONE OF GOA CONCERNS IS ITS UNFAVORABLE (FOR GOA) BALANCE OF TRADE WITH US. IN SPITE OF CURRENT ADVERSE ECONOMIC CONDITIONS HERE, US SALES HAVE HELD UP. FURTHERMORE, US IS NOT DEPENDENT ON ARGENTINA FOR FLOW OF ANY CRITICAL RAW MATERIALS: SUGAR, MEAT AND MEAT PRODUCTS HAVE BEEN PRINCIPAL US IMPORTS. AT THE SAME TIME, THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT GOA WOULD LIKE TO BE LESS DEPENDENT ON US TRADE AND US
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OR US SUPPORTED FINANCING. IN RECENT YEARS, GOA HAS SOUGHT CLOSER TRADING TIES--WITHOUT NOTABLE SUCCESS--WITH THE EAST BLOC COUNTRIES, INCLUDING THE USSR, CUBA AND CHINA. GOA HAS ALSO PLAYED ACTIVE ROLE IN ORGANIZATION OF LATIN AMERICAN ECONOMIC SYSTEM (SELA), REMAINS MEMBER OF LAFTA AND PROBABLY HOPES THAT EVENTUALLY LATIN AMERICAN ORGANIZATIONS WILL PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR DIMINISHING GOA/US INTERDEPENDENCE. SAME THING CAN BE SAID, WITH RESPECT TO POLITICAL RELATIONS IN THAT GOA POLICY EVIDENTLY AIMED AT GRADUAL INCREASE IMPORTANCE OF MULTILATERAL LA RELATIONS AT EXPENSE OF US INFLUENCE.

15. ARGENTINES GENERALLY REMAIN CONVINCED THAT THE US COULD GIVE MASSIVE ASSISTANCE TO DEVELOPING COUNTRIES IF IT WISHED TO. THEY HAVE LITTLE APPRECIATION FOR THE US'S OWN ECONOMIC PROBLEMS. SUGGESTIONS ON OUR SIDE THAT THE US SIMPLY COULD NOT PROVIDE ARGENTINA WITH THE AMOUNT OF FINANCING IT BELIEVES IT REQUIRES EVEN IF ALL CONDITIONS WERE FAVORABLE ARE GENERALLY COUNTERED BY POINTING TO THE MASSIVE US ASSISTANCE TO VIETNAM OR SUBSTANTIAL ASSISTANCE TO OTHER AREAS. IF YOU CAN DO IT THERE, WHY NOT HERE, THEY ASK.

16. IN SUM, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF A FEW TRAINED OBSERVERS, MOST ARGENTINES, CAUGHT UP IN THEIR OWN INTERNAL PROBLEMS, PERCEIVE ONLY VAGUELY, AS THROUGH A FOG, CHANGING US FACTORS. THEY UNDERSTAND THAT THE US MAY HAVE BEEN RELATIVELY WEAKENED, BUT CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT IT HAS THE POWER AND WEALTH TO WORK ITS WILL IF IT SO WISHED. IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, THEN, WHAT IS SOMEWHAT IN QUESTION IS US WILL, NOT ITS CAPABILITIES, AND IT IS INCOMPREHENSIBLE TO MOST ARGENTINES THAT THE US MAY HAVE LOST THE WILL TO PROTECT AND ASSURE ITS OWN INTERESTS IN THE WORLD. IF THEY ONCE CONCLUDED THAT IT HAD, THEN THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF THE US AS A HEMISPHERIC PARTNER (OR ANTAGONIST) WOULD CHANGE MARKEDLY. HILL UNQUOTE KISSINGER

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